

Second record of Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea* in Madagascar

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Deuxième observation de l'Etourneau caronculé *Creatophora cinerea* à Madagascar.

La présente note rapporte l'observation le 18 octobre 2008 de deux Etourneaux caronculés *Creatophora cinerea* dans le sud-ouest de Madagascar. Cette espèce distribuée principalement en Afrique australe et orientale est connue pour son comportement erratique. Il s'agit de la deuxième observation de cette espèce à Madagascar depuis la première réalisée en 1989, également dans le sud-ouest de l'île.

On 18 October 2008, we were birding in south-west Madagascar around Hotel Salary Bay (22°33'S 43°17'E) on the coast halfway between Toliara and Morombe. The most dominant habitat there is dry spiny forest thicket dominated by Didieraceae and arborescent euphorbs such as *Euphorbia enterophora* (Euphorbiaceae) (Moat & Smith 2007) growing on deep sandy soil. The weather conditions were excellent with a light wind and very good light. This region of Madagascar receives little rainfall, c.450 mm p.a. (Nicoll & Langrand 1989), mostly in December–February, thus at the time of observation the region was very dry with little fresh water available to birds.

Between 16.30 and 18.00 hrs we were observing birds 6 km north of Salary Bay, where a permanent water source was attracting birds just 400 m from the coast. The spring is surrounded by a reedbed *Phragmites mauritianus* with a larger area of grasses (Gramineae), *Salicornia pachystachia*

and scattered bushes of *Cryptostegia grandiflora*, which is certainly flooded seasonally, extending north for c.800 m. The east side of the dry lake is bordered by dry spiny forest thicket dominated by trees such as *Tamarindus indica*, *Didierea madagascariensis*, *Ficus* sp., *Commiphora* spp., and *Adansonia za*. The waterhole was visited by various birds including Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*, Grey-headed Lovebird *Agapornis canus*, Malagasy Turtle Dove *Streptopelia picturata* and Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*, the most numerous of which was the first-named. As we were observing a small group of six Common Mynas perched on a *Cryptostegia grandiflora* we noticed two smaller starlings perched with them. The plumage of these two smaller individuals was dull greyish brown with darker wings, very conspicuous whitish uppertail-coverts and a small but characteristic bare patch behind the eye. As we both have extensive experience of African birds, we



Figure 1. Wattled Starlings *Creatophora cinerea*, 6 km north of Salary Bay, south-west Madagascar, 18 October 2008 (Matthias von Bechtolsheim)

Etourneaux caronculés *Creatophora cinerea*, 6 km au nord de la Baie de Salary, Madagascar du sud-ouest, 18 octobre 2008 (Matthias von Bechtolsheim)

easily identified them as adult Wattled Starlings *Creatophora cinerea* in non-breeding plumage (Fig. 1). The Wattled Starlings remained in the vicinity of the water for c.30 minutes, moving from the bush to a large tree at the edge of the dry lake, waiting with a group of 30 Common Mynas for the opportunity to drink.

Wattled Starling is widespread in southern and eastern sub-Saharan Africa and is a highly nomadic and gregarious species that usually feeds in dry grassy savannah, on locusts (Fry *et al.* 2000). It moves widely in the non-breeding season, when it has also been recorded in Central and West Africa (Borrow & Demey 2001), and even as far afield as Yemen and Oman in the Middle East (Porter *et al.* 1996, Eriksen *et al.* 2003), and in Seychelles, where long-staying birds have been reported from Bird Island and Aldabra (Skerrett & Bullock 2001). On Seychelles, three records have been accepted by the Seychelles Bird Records Committee, one from Bird Island, in July 1995–February 1996, and two from Aldabra, with up to 14 birds there in September 1999–June 2000 (Skerrett *et al.* 2006, 2007). On Europa Atoll, off south-west Madagascar, there is a record of three birds in May 1994 (Le Corre & Probst 1997).

Wattled Starling is also an exceptional vagrant to Madagascar, where the first sighting was reported by Alec Forbes-Watson, near Manombo, 48 km north of Toliara, on 21 November 1989, when eight individuals in non-breeding plumage were observed (Langrand & Sinclair 1994). The 1989 sighting was made 50 km south of Salary Bay, where the second record, reported here, was made. The grass-covered surroundings of dry lakes are common along the coast between Toliara and Morondava, and probably constitute suitable habitat for any Wattled Starlings that accidentally reach Madagascar.

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